

Second Congregational Church
13-17 Clarke Street
Newport
Newport County
Rhode Island

HABS No. RI-325

HABS
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

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SECOND CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

Location: 13-17 Clarke Street
Newport, Rhode Island

Present Owner: St. Joseph's Church of Newport
5 Mann Avenue, Newport, Rhode Island

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: The building was completed September 15, 1735. It served as barracks for British troops 1776-1779 during their occupation and as a hospital for the French while they were in Newport. The building was called "Dr. Stiles Meeting House" for the Rev. Ezra Stiles, D.D. 1727-1795. He was associated with the church from 1755-1786 and in 1787 was elected president of Yale University.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of erection: 1735
2. Architect: Cotton Palmer
3. Original and subsequent owners:

Chain of title: Second Congregational Church
13-17 Clarke Street
Plat __, Lot __
Tax Assessor's Office
Newport, Rhode Island

1785 Deed of October 9, 1785, recorded in LEB. 3, p.209.

From: Jebidee Grinnell
To: Second Congregational Church

"quit claim to ... certain lot, ... measuring in length 95', and in width from N. to S. 25' bounded Northerly by land of Wm. Grinnell (deceased) + Peleg Barker, Easterly on Clark St. Southerly by land of 2nd Congregational Church, and Westerly by land of John Anthony and Joseph Belcher ... said lot now being in the possession of the 2nd Congregational Church."

1800 Deed of April 24, 1800, recorded in LEB. 7, p.237.

Between second Congregational Church and Joshua Wilbur to fix Northern Boundary Line mentions Peter Coggeshall gave property to church.

1835 Deed of August 15, 1835, recorded in LEB. 20, p.450.

From: United Congregational Church
To: George Tilley
For: \$1210.00

"Certain lot of land ... and The Meeting House bounded East on Clarke St., 107; Southerly by land of Audley Clarke (dec) 95; Westerly by land of Asher Robbins, 102', Northerly land of Gideon Richmond, (dec.) 97;

1847 Deed of March 12, 1847, recorded LEB 26, p.381-2.

From: George W. Tilley - L.W.+T of George Tilley
To: Central Baptist Church
For: \$1200.00

"Land together with the meeting house, heretofore owned and occupied by the Second Congregational Church and Society. Bounded Westerly by Asher Rough 102; Gideon Richmond 97' Southerly Artillery Co. 95', and Easterly on Clarke Street (107')

1950 Deed of March 9, 1950, recorded in LEG. 72, p.108-110.

From: United Baptist Church
To: Corporation of St. Joseph's Church of Newport
For: \$50.000

Site bounded Easterly on Clarke Street, 107; Southerly by land of Newport Artillery Co. 100', Westerly by land of grantee 65.75' and Southerly 4" and Westerly 35.5', Northerly by land formerly of Gideon Richmond and now Clarence B. Dixon 97'.

4. Builder: Cotton Palmer

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The original 18th century style was nearly totally lost during the 19th century alterations. Heavy damage during the Revolutionary War required extensive repairs in 1785. In 1847 the Central Baptist Society lengthened the building to 93' and enclosed the tower within the body of the church and added a Greek Revival exterior and interior.

In 1874-1875 wings were added, the floor level was probably raised and a full basement inserted. Victorian detail was added to the facade and interior and the configuration of the spire was altered slightly. The spire was removed in 1946. Some portions of the roof structure and tower base seem to be all that remain of the original building.

2. Condition of fabric: Poor. There is fire damage at the southwest corner of the tower and auditorium and water damage from the leaking roof.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Rectangular, 80' x 90', three bay facade (east) one story plus basement
2. Foundations: Stone.
3. Wall construction: Frame with clapboards. Panelled corner pilasters meet flat architrave boards under the eaves in typical neo-classical treatment.
4. Frame: The lower parts are entirely rebuilt. Original roof trusses are in place with later intermediate roof bracing. Parts of the original tower structure also survive.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Two panelled entrance doors in heavy classical doorways.
 - b. Windows: Probably from the 1840's. Paired, round headed, painted glass. Two windows nearly whole, four in fragmentary condition, two missing, similar window of different pattern in narthex.
6. Roof:
 - a. Gable roof: Gable end to front.
 - b. Cornice, eaves: Boxed molded eaves with deep architrave boards.
 - c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: Square tower, the surviving base of the 18th century tower, with 19th surfacing and ornament.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor Plan: Wide, shallow narthex at ground level. Two broad stairs at each front door lead up six steps to auditorium on main level. Center stair from narthex leads down seven steps to basement. Auditorium has shallow balcony at east, west end remodelled in mid-20th century with a stage eliminating 18th century Baptist ecclesiastical furniture. Auditorium has slightly defined side aisles with four bays and square columns. Basement is apparently mostly of the 1840s with a large meeting room with steps and two smaller rooms, a lounge and a kitchen. Stairway railings probably of the 1840s.

2. Flooring: Both floors are wooden.
 3. Wall and ceiling finish: Mostly from the 1870s. Plaster walls and ceilings on both floors.
 4. Special decorative features, trim and cabinet work: Square pews and wooden columns in the auditorium of the 1870s. Carved pews probably of the same period of 1840s.
 5. Heating, lighting and plumbing: Electric lighting and hot water heating disconnected.
- D. Site: The church faces east on a residential street. Part of a rich 18th-19th century setting.

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

Newport HABS Project — 1969. Sponsored in cooperation with the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, Antoinette F. Downing, Chairman. Under the direction of James C. Massey, Chief of HABS, and Osmund Overby (University of Missouri), Project Supervisor Jack E. Boucher, photographer.

Prepared by: Osmund Overby
National Park Service
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